

R 170853Z APR 09
FM AMCONSUL SHANGHAI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7849
INFO AMEMBASSY BEIJING
AMCONSUL CHENGDU
AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
NSC WASHINGTON DC
AMCONSUL SHENYANG
AIT TAIPEI 1706
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SHANGHAI 000178

STATE FOR DRL/IRF
NSC FOR KUCHTA-HELBLING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 4/17/2034
TAGS: PGOV PHUM ECON KIRF SCUL CH

SUBJECT: AMERICAN BISHOP SHARES IMPRESSIONS OF EASTER IN SHANGHAI AND PROGRESS IN RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

REF: A. (A) 08 SHANGHAI 407
¶B. (B) 08 SHANGHAI 374
¶C. (C) SHANGHAI 162

CLASSIFIED BY: BEATRICE CAMP, CONSUL GENERAL, U.S. CONSULATE SHANGHAI, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) An American Catholic Bishop who was born in Beijing shared his views on celebrating Easter in Shanghai during a lunch with Chinese religious leaders and academics at the Consulate. The Bishop and Chinese guests asserted that much progress has been made for religious believers in Shanghai who have greater freedom of worship than they previously enjoyed. Two guests also described recent developments, including exporting Chinese Bibles to the United States and planning to accommodate foreigners' religious needs during the upcoming Shanghai 2010 World Expo. End Summary.

Bishop Wang's Visit to Shanghai

¶2. (C) Bishop Ignatius Wang currently is the Auxiliary Bishop in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. He was born in Beijing in 1934 and was ordained a priest in 1959 in Hong Kong. Because of the lack of relations between the Vatican and China's Catholic Church, Bishop Wang never has served in China. He is the first Catholic Bishop of Chinese ancestry to be appointed in the United States. He was the first Chinese Catholic pastor in San Francisco when he was appointed pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church in 1982. Bishop Wang arrived in Shanghai for a private visit on April 11; the Consul General hosted a lunch in his honor on April 15.

American Bishop Impressed with Progress in Shanghai

¶3. (C) Bishop Wang described giving Mass on Easter Sunday to a standing room only crowd at Xujiahui Cathedral, Shanghai's largest Catholic church. Bishop Wang told the Consul General he originally had planned to participate in the Mass at a much smaller church, St. Francis, but Bishop Jin Luxian insisted that he preside over the Xujiahui service. Bishop Wang said at least 2,000 people attended the Mass at Xujiahui, overflowing the historic church. The Bishop's nephew, Joseph Yeun, added that the pews were already filled when he arrived at the church a half-hour prior to the start of the Easter service.

¶4. (C) Bishop Wang recounted how much the state of religion in China has improved since his first return to China after reform and opening. In 1982, the Bishop said, he visited Beijing and

snuck into one of the Catholic cathedrals there, finding trash everywhere and broken pews. The progress since that time is "unbelievable," he said.

Shanghai's Catholic Church Focused on Education

¶ 15. (C) Shanghai Catholic Diocese Vice Vicar General Ai Zuzhang also said the current situation for Catholics in Shanghai is good. Certainly, there are external problems with China-Vatican relations, currently prohibiting Chinese Catholic officials from having contact with the Pope, but those issues have little influence on Shanghai Catholics, he said. Bishop Ai, who was sent to labor camp in 1951 expecting to be executed and persecuted during the Cultural Revolution (he described the former in a February Mass homily in Shanghai) reiterated to PolOff that the Chinese Catholic Church is expending a great amount of energy on identifying younger leaders, as the current crop of bishops all are elderly (Bishop Ai is 83, and head of the Shanghai Diocese Bishop Jin Luxian (Ref A) is 92). Nearly seventy men are preparing for ordination at the diocese's Sheshan Seminary, but only 30 of the candidates for the priesthood hail from Shanghai. The nearly 40 other candidates hail from several other Chinese dioceses; all of them and even several of the Shanghai-born will go to dioceses other than Shanghai upon ordination. Shanghai's shortage of Catholic clergy will not end anytime soon.

¶ 16. (C) More importantly, Bishop Ai said, he personally has focused much of his attention on educating children through Sunday School and other activities. If the Catholic Church "cannot get through to six- and seven-year olds," he said, then Shanghai never will have a future generation that sees that faith and religion is "more important than money."

Religious Affairs Bureau's Positive Spin ...

¶ 17. (C) Wang Xinhua, Director of the Foreign Affairs Division at the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs (RAB), told PolOff on April 14, the day before the lunch, that Shanghai now has 400 registered churches, 1800 religious workers (clergy), and more than 800,000 believers. Wang added that the number of expatriate religious practitioners had increased from 50,000 in the 1980s to 180,000 today. (Note: Wang's statistics do not take unregistered churches into account, which would multiply the number of churches, clergy and believers, by several times. End Note.) Wang acknowledged that there is a fundamental difference between how the United States and China "manage religion." Americans don't understand why China has a RAB, Wang said, and "we don't understand why you don't have one."

... and Less Positive Views of the RAB

¶ 18. (C) Edward Xu, professor at Fudan University's Center for American Studies, and Wu Jianrong of the Shanghai YMCA, both said they expect that China's religious group oversight system, run by the State Administration of Religious Affairs and local Religious Affairs Bureaus like that from which Wang Xinhua came, will soon collapse. First, with only 2,500 personnel nationwide, the religious affairs administration system is vastly understaffed for its purported mission, and many of the staff it attracts are less capable bureaucrats than those who find employment in other ministries and agencies. Second and much more importantly, the system is illogical and it is inappropriate to ban some faiths or denominations while officially registering others and turning a blind eye to the activities of some but not all others. They noted the growth of the Ba'hai faith (especially among intellectuals such as university faculty members) and Mormonism, the variety of Christian denominations and affiliated missionaries when only the Patriotic Catholic Church and the non-denominational Protestant Church are officially allowed, and the historical legacy of Judaism in Shanghai and its continuing expatriate presence here (Judaism is not recognized as one of China's five official religions) (Ref C).

¶19. (C) Professor Xu said he believes China is on the verge of being a religious "exporter." The Amity Foundation in Nanjing already exports printed Bibles to more than 70 countries, he said, including to the United States (Ref B). Bishop Wang said China was the low bidder on the printing of a bilingual New Testament that soon will be sold in the United States for a nominal price. Perhaps someday, Xu told Bishop Wang, there will be Chinese Christian missionaries traveling to the United States to proselytize. Bishop Wang said that in the San Francisco area, there already are a considerable number of priests from the Philippines and several from Africa. Xu told Pol/Econ Chief that three years ago Fudan had received permission from the Reverend Billy Graham to establish a Billy Graham Chair of Religious Studies, but Central Government permission is not forthcoming. Xu said that many Western observers do not have an informed view of the true situation and scope of religious practice in China.

... Caring for Migrants and Their Children ...

¶10. (C) Wu Jianrong, sporting a necktie with the names of books of the Bible, described the expansion of YMCA staffing and service programs since he joined that organization in 1991. The Shanghai office staff has grown from 20 to more than one hundred over the last 18 years. The organization's historic headquarters in downtown Shanghai is undergoing renovation and is due to reopen in October. Through service programs, staff and volunteers bring an implicit Christian message to many Chinese, some of whom will then ask to meet pastors and join congregations. The Shanghai YMCA has concluded that the several million migrant workers and family members in the Shanghai area are unlikely to ever permanently return home to their native places elsewhere in China. Their situation as migrant workers, in many ways marginalized from the Shanghai mainstream, calls out for better access to affordable medical care, improved educational opportunities for their children, and better diets, if the migrants' youngsters are going to reach adulthood in Shanghai with positive self-images, confidence and the ability to provide for themselves and loved ones. The situation of migrant children poses a challenge to city leaders, the Central Government and society writ large, Wu said - and provides an opportunity for Christians to intervene or assist in constructive, compassionate ways.

¶11. (C) One recent initiative of the Shanghai YMCA is to staff occasional free medical diagnostic clinics in migrant communities in Shanghai with volunteer medical personnel. They will provide free physician-signed written medical evaluations, explain treatment options and recommend which Shanghai hospital(s) or clinic(s) the patients should consider going to for treatment. This provides informed medical information to patients and directs them to appropriate medical care facilities, thus reducing time and expense for the migrants and for the government which has a role in financing health care. Wu said he had presented data on migrant children's weight, height, incidence of health problems and educational attainment levels at a recent meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference to highlight the need to address migrant children's needs as a pressing social issue. Fellow delegates recognized the importance. Government officials acknowledged the challenge and the need to preclude potential future social problems, Wu said, but they also said government agencies currently lack the wherewithal to adequately tackle the multiple facets of this challenge. Thus the officials encouraged NGOs such as the YMCA to step into the gap and provide social services to this group.

... and Prayer Rooms at the Shanghai 2010 World Expo

¶12. (C) Yan Kejia, Director of the Religious Studies Institute at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), told the Consul General he is focusing more of his research on Shanghai's provision of religious services to expatriates. In particular,

Yan said, he has been asked to commission a study on how to provide religious services to foreign visitors during the Shanghai 2010 World Expo. According to Wu Jianrong, General Secretary of the Shanghai YMCA, the Beijing Olympics also had attempted to offer venues for foreign Protestants and Catholics.

Both Wu and Yan said, however, that given Shanghai's attraction as a "city of immigrants" and the Expo's six-month duration, establishing a means to provide "prayer tents" to foreigners is even more important.

Bio Notes on Chinese Guests

¶13. (SBU) The following six Chinese guests attended the lunch in honor of Bishop Wang:

--Bishop Ai Zuzhang: Born in 1925, Bishop Ai is a native of Shanghai. He began his Seminary studies in 1947 and was ordained in 1954. He has been affiliated with the Xujiahui Catholic Church (St. Ignatius Cathedral) for more than 20 years.

Bishop Ai is a deputy of Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, and like his mentor, Bishop Ai endured terrible suffering during China's Cultural Revolution period. Previously recounting his experiences for younger priests, Bishop Ai has stated, "When I finished up in the re-education camps, I asked myself: how am I going to get through? But, then, instead it was the gift of God which did everything for me. Even my health improved." Ai has a younger brother and a younger sister in the United States (he himself was one of nine children) and he has visited the United States at least once, about 15 years ago. When first taken into custody in 1951, his parents were in Hong Kong, which was another factor in his expectation about imminent execution. The Ai family is one of four family names in Shanghai with a 400-year connection to Catholicism, he added. Ai will not succeed Bishop Jin upon Jin's passing; Bishop Xing, now in his forties, has already been designated as Jin's successor.

--Yan Kejia: Professor Yan is the Director of the Religious Studies Institute at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences and a key advisor on religious issues to the Shanghai Municipal Government. The 45-year-old scholar earned graduate and undergraduate degrees from the Fudan University Philosophy Department, and he was a visiting scholar at Harvard University during the 1995-96 academic year. He also was a research fellow at the University of Mumbai in 2000-01. Catholicism is one of Professor Yan's primary research interests, and he authored a book, entitled "Catholics in China" in 2004. Much of his recent research since 2004 has focused on the religious practice of Shanghai's expatriate community.

--Pan Guang: In addition to serving as the Director of the Institute of European and Asian Studies at SASS, Professor Pan also is the Dean of the Center of Jewish Studies Shanghai. He received a PhD and MA from East China Normal University in Shanghai and a BA from Renmin University in Beijing. He has written several books and articles on the Jewish experience in China, including "The Jews in China," "The Jews in Shanghai," and "The Jewish Civilization." Professor Pan has been widely recognized for his work on religious issues, and then-UN Secretary General Kofi Annan named Pan as a member of the High Level Group of the UN Alliance of Civilizations. He also is a recipient of the Austria Holocaust Memorial Award (2006) and several other awards for Sino-Jewish studies.

--Wang Xinhua: The Director of the Foreign Affairs Division of the Shanghai Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) since 2000, Wang has worked at the RAB since 1989. A Shanghai native, the 46-year-old Wang is a Fudan University graduate, having received a bachelor's degree in History and a master's degree in Modern Chinese Culture. He worked for the Civil Aviation Institute of China from 1984 to 1986.

--Edward Yihua Xu: Dr. Xu is an expert on religion in the United States and teaches graduate and undergraduate students at Fudan University's Center for American Studies. He received his PhD in Religion from Princeton University in 1994. His research interests also include theological education in China, and he has written several articles on the Nanjing Theological Seminary

and other religious education institutions. He is the editor of two biannual journals. He will participate in a June 2009 Shanghai conference between Fudan and Georgetown University on the role of religion in international affairs.

--Wu Jianrong: In addition to serving as a Vice Chairman of the Shanghai Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) of Protestant Churches, Wu also is the General Secretary of the Shanghai YMCA. He began working for the YMCA in 1991. At the YMCA, Wu is at the forefront of expanding the work of NGOs in the provision of social services in Shanghai. Through the YMCA, Wu was very active in providing relief to earthquake victims in Sichuan in 2008. Wu promotes exchanges between the YMCA and U.S. visitors.

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